

2001 Annual Wildland Fire Report Southwest Area

Arizona, New Mexico, & West Texas




An Interagency Report of the



PREPARED BY:
Southwest Coordination Center
Fire Intelligence Section
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This interagency report will summarize wildland fire activities in the Southwest Area during 2001. It is broken down into the following sections:

- I. Highlights**
- II. Fire Season Statistics**
- III. Incident Support Summary**

Section I



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SOUTHWEST FIRE MANAGEMENT BOARD



2001 will certainly be remembered as the year that the National Fire Plan burst upon the scene. From a suppression standpoint, 2001 was a moderate season for the Southwest Area. Though there was some significant fire activity, the Southwest never went above Preparedness Level 3, so MAC Group activity was minimal for the Board. The SWFMB was kept very busy, however, with our regular business and National Fire Plan implementation.

Late in the year 2000, the Board recognized that the National Fire Plan activities called for collaboration and cooperation up to the highest levels. The SWFMB approached the Regional Executive Committee (REC) of the Southwest Strategy to see if the REC would like the Board to assist with coordination and oversight of the interagency National Fire Plan activities. The REC appointed the SWFMB as an advisory and working group. In that capacity the Board implemented the existing Southwest Area interagency fire management framework as a focal point for agencies and communities to work together on National Fire Plan issues and projects. The Board appointed an Implementation Working group for each state. In the wake of the 2000 fire season the REC asked the Board to provide briefings to the New Mexico Governor, the Energy, Minerals, and Natural Resources and Environment Department Cabinet Secretaries, and New Mexico congressional staffs on the land management agencies' preparations for the 2001 season. The briefings focused on the preparations and changes instituted by the agencies and the Board to prevent a disastrous season like 2000.

In regular business, the Board converted the Fire Prevention working group to a permanent committee and approved their charter. A Fire Information Committee was created and chartered to work closely with the Fire Prevention Committee, and the Fire Equipment Committee was revived. The SWFMB made a commitment to strongly encourage and actively seek contribution and participation by the Zone Fire Management Boards at all SWFMB meetings. In the spring, the Taos Zone requested the Board to put together a team to review the Taos Zone organization and dispatch center. The interagency team visited the Zone and put together a report with recommendations aimed at improving Zone interactions and operations. A development that came out of that action was that SWCC asked the Board to oversee a review of SWCC customer service, operations and space needs. The team for that review used the Interagency Preparedness Review Guide format, and their formal report should be presented to the Board in late January of '02.

The Type 1 teams enjoyed a fairly busy and very successful season, traveling far and wide for assignments, and garnering recognition and appreciation wherever they went. In September, Van Bateman's team went to assist FDNY with logistics and planning for the World Trade Center disaster. A number of changes in the Board's lineup took place in 2001. Pam McAlpin joined the Board as BLM Arizona's representative. At the Board meeting in October, I concluded my term as the Board Chair, and Kirk Rowdabaugh of Arizona State Forestry assumed the chair duties. Bill Waterbury, the Forest Service representative, was chosen as the vice-chair.

Bob Lee
Chairperson, 1999-2001

USDA FOREST SERVICE REGION 3 SOUTHWESTERN REGION



The 2001 Wildland Fire Season in the Southwest was a "less than normal season" after the long 2000 season. Severity funds were utilized in the Southwest mainly on the New Mexico Forests where we had large fire activity at the heart of the season. The region remained dry through the fall, but did not have the lighting or the human starts that usually cause a rash of small fall season wildland fires. A number of large incidents we managed with limited suppression due to fire fighter safety and low resource values. We also managed over 30,000 acres of Wildland Fire Use on the Gila NF through the late season and fall.

It was another challenging season for supplying resources to incidents throughout the nation starting in January and finally finishing in early December. Southern Area, mainly Florida, was having wildland fire problems in January causing movements of heavy air tankers and other resources through and fro the Southwestern Area. When the Northwest Region fire season began in July the Southwest replied with crews and overhead. It was a record year for engine assignments; at one time we had over 150 engines out of region. The National response to the September 11 affected the Southwest in many ways, primarily in providing a National Incident Management Team to New York City and many overhead and crews in support roles. We finished the year supplying crews to the Eastern Region through Thanksgiving.

The year brought many more changes in personnel for the Region. Bill Waterbury replaced Charlie Denton as Assistant Director for Operations for the Region. Richard Neito became the Fire Staff Officer for the Cibola NF, John Merino returned to the position of Engineering Staff. Ed Hollingshead on the Prescott NF moved to the National Ground Safety position in Boise. Bob Leaverton accepted the new position as Deputy Director for Aviation and Fire, plus continued to serve as the Team Leader for the National Fire Plan for the Region.

The Southwest Fire Use Training (FUTA) Academy and program moved to a new facility in Albuquerque. The modern classrooms and training equipment will greatly enhance the quality of the interagency training provided. In 2001 over 300 trainees attended sessions at the academy.

2001 was the startup year of the National Fire Plan and resulted in a heavy hiring year to meet 100% of Most Efficient Level (MEL). This included a new Hotshot crew and over 500 positions in Aviation and Fire Management. The forests worked hard to meet assigned fuels targets under the National Fire Plan and the Region met 130% of accomplishment, along with supplying resources for wildland fire.

Bill Waterbury
Assistant Director, Operations
Aviation and Fire Management

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT NEW MEXICO STATE OFFICE FIRE AND AVIATION GROUP



The first season under the National Fire Plan was an interesting one for BLM New Mexico. We had an above average number of wildfire starts (192) but the acres burned were way below average (5,500). Though the fire weather conditions were less severe than in some recent years, a certain measure of our success can be attributed to the enhanced firefighting forces made possible by National Fire Plan funding.

We had a lot of work to do to get our prescribed fire and fuels program ramped up to meet the intent and direction of the National Fire Plan. We got most of our early-season ecosystem-type projects completed, but rains in mid-June prevented us from completing a number of the larger landscape burns we had planned. We took advantage of that by focusing on mechanical treatments and ended up achieving 150% of our target in that category.

With the increased funding from the National Fire Plan, BLM New Mexico made a number of augmentations and additions to the fire program as well other programs. Our engine crews' size were increased to provide for seven days a week staffing and older engines were replaced, a single engine airtanker was contracted for the Roswell air tanker base, prescribed fire/fuels crews and specialists were added to the field offices along with dispatch and prevention positions. Two positions were added to the state office fire staff. We are also working to improve the infrastructure, especially our radio system. Funding has been made available for non-fire positions to provide planning, approval, and support for fire and fuels projects.

BLM NM worked closely with our partner agencies and communities to ensure that we made the best use of the new money. At the Zone level, we coordinated on the community protection projects mandated by the National Fire Plan. BLM NM also passed \$320,000 directly to rural and volunteer fire departments to increase their wildfire suppression capability by providing equipment and training.

Community protection projects were focused on the locations identified on the "Twenty Communities" list developed by New Mexico State Forestry, as well as on projects already underway. The Las Cruces field office, working with the community and the Gila National Forest, contracted locally with small businesses to put in a fuel break around the town of Piños Altos. The BLM National Office of Fire and Aviation took note of this project and recognized the demanding coordination and collaboration between numerous cooperators by awarding the Las Cruces Field office with the first ever National Wildland-Urban Interface Project Award.

Along with the other agencies, BLM New Mexico sent people and equipment to other states to help out after our fire season moderated.

There were a number of changes in the fire program staffs this year. Loren DeRosear from the Las Cruces field office was selected for a position in the Fish and Wildlife Service Regional Office in Albuquerque. Ryan Whiteaker took the position of Prescribed Fire/Fuels specialist for Las Cruces. Our Carlsbad field office entered into an interagency fire program with the Guadalupe Ranger District of the Lincoln NF, and Paul Schmidtke was selected as the interagency FMO. Ty Bryson is the new Prescribed Fire/Fuels specialist for the Carlsbad interagency program. In Albuquerque, Todd Richards came on board as the Prescribed Fire/Fuels specialist. Roger Onstadt moved into the Prescribed Fire/Fuels specialist position in Socorro, and Brian Watts became the Prescribed Fire/Fuels specialist for the Farmington field office.

At the state office staff, Hallie Locklear took a position with the Fish and Wildlife Service National Office in Boise, and Brian Lee (from the Apache/Sitgreaves NF) accepted our offer for the BLM New Mexico's position in SWCC. Carol Salo came down from BLM's Alaska Fire Service as the new Program and Budget Analyst. Dave Bott took the Fire Operations Specialist position, coming from the BLM Utah state office.

In 2002 we will strive for another safe and effective season for our suppression forces. Our focus will be on improving and enhancing our community protection programs and enhancing our ecosystem restoration projects. We hope to achieve some long-range goals emphasizing collaboration with our partners that we have been working toward for a while. In particular, we hope to provide assistance and subject-matter expertise to the New Mexico Environment Department and also to the Area-wide training effort and Fire Use Academy.

Bob Lee
State Fire Management Officer

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE INTERMOUNTAIN REGION SOUTHWESTERN PARKS



In 2001 several new employees came on board at the central office - Evelyn Roadway, Art Latterell, Len Dems, Janet Passek, Dave Hammond, Eva Long, Linda Kerr, Ben McGrane and Scott Girouard – in positions as Clerical Assistant, Wildland Fire Management Specialist, GIS Specialist, Compliance Specialist, Fire Ecologist, and Contract Specialist. Later in the year, Janet Passek moved to ZION as the FMO and Bob Lineback replaced her. Jeanie Harris accepted the position of Regional FIREPRO Budget Analyst.

Projects for this year included development and implementation of National Fire Plan Orientations for IMR Superintendents, participation in DOI Cohesive Strategy development, national program reviews at GRCA and SAGU, a regional program review at BIBE, and incident reviews for Bircher and Pony fires at MEVE. A particular problem experienced during this year's fire season was the shortage of Fire Use Managers to support park wildland fire use assignments. As a significant fire season was wrapping up in September, the Branch of Fire and Aviation became a major contributor to the NPS response to the 9/11/01 response.

MAC groups were activated in all four geographic areas within the IMR this season.

The Fire GIS personnel supported Inventory and Monitoring Program Vegetation Mapping at BAND, FLFO, GRTE, ROMO and the Colorado Plateau area. They also provided project and program support to BIBE, BITH, ELMA, CHIC, ROMO, LAMR, DINO and FLFO. In addition, a prototype Fire and GIS Workshop was designed and tested.

Central Office Aviation activity included conducting regional aviation program reviews at BIBE, GLCA, GRCA, ORPI, YELL, and MEVE. A new FAIRSHARE helitack program was initiated at ZION, and existing programs at BAND, MEVE, GRCA, and GRTE were supplemented under the National Fire Plan. A PowerPoint program for general aviators concerning Temporary Flight Restrictions (TFRs) and flight safety in vicinity of wildland fires was developed. The program was adopted by the FAA and various aviation organizations, including the Experimental Aircraft Association. A service-wide project was initiated to automate aviation qualifications and certification for "all risk" via the SACS. An A-76 study was initiated to evaluate aircraft acquisition for BIBE (helicopter), IMRO (fixed wing), and YELL (Fixed wing).

The Intermountain Region hired three new fire ecologists. One lead fire effects monitor successfully competed for a newly established fourth fire ecologist position. Intermountain Region has an interagency fire effects crew with employees from both the National Park Service and the Forest Service. We will have an interagency fire monitoring plan on-line sometime this fiscal year. Thirty-six park areas are being served with fire ecology/fire effects monitoring capabilities from ten established fire effects crews.

Intermountain Region fire effects crews provided expertise for prescribed fire, wildland fire use, resource management activities, preparation of burn plans, vegetation mapping, interagency fire effects and fire training, fire management planning, and completed suppression assignments. Intermountain Region has two monitoring plans on-line and several more in preparation.

Intermountain Region has implemented pilot sampling for manual fuels treatments at several parks. The region has reported 2890 plot visits in the past ten years. The Intermountain Region provided personnel for an interagency training opportunity for Delaware, Maryland, and

West Virginia Fish and Wildlife Service personnel. Intermountain Region fire effects and ecology personnel presented several professional papers at the George Wright Society and local ecological symposia.

Wildland Fire

Colorado Plateau Cluster - Numerous significant incidents occurred in parks in the Colorado Plateau Cluster in 2001. A siege-like season at the GRCA North Rim at GRCA resulted in numerous large fires, with about 10,000 acres burned under Wildland Fire Implementation Plans. DINO also experienced an active fire season; near the end of fire season, an escaped BLM prescribed fire came into the park, resulting in varying degrees of resource damage. ELMA was able to complete an interagency fire management plan with the BLM-Albuquerque Field Office. ZION experienced more fires in 2001 than in any previous year, including a successful major Wildland Fire Use incident while in National Planning Level 4/5. MEVE completed field work for burned area rehabilitation for the Bircher and Pony fires of 2000. Work to correct severe suppression impacts is continuing on the Fort Ranch Fire at GOSP, through a burned area rehabilitation project. The following parks hosted management teams within the Cluster:

IMT2	FUMT
GRCA	GRCA (5)
	DINO
	ZION

Rocky Mountain Cluster - Most activity was experienced at GLAC and YELL during this fire season. Both parks experienced large cross-boundary fires with their cooperators that were long duration and required intensive coordination. In addition, President Bush visited ROMO on a trip designed to support National Fire Plan initiatives during the fire season. GRTE managed two natural ignitions.

Team Assignments within the Cluster:

IMT1	FUMT
GLAC	YELL (2)
YELL	

Southwest Cluster - Large fire occurrence was not as extensive this year in comparison with other years. GUMO sustained one large fire that was rained-out as the IMT arrived. An entrapment investigation related to the 2000 Monument Fire at PECO was conducted. The fire facility at SAGU neared completion. LAMR and BITH enjoyed substantial accomplishment on fuels targets. BAND continued work to improve interagency coordination. Team Assignments within the Cluster:

IMT2
CAVE

IMR Fuels Program:

In 2001, Fire Management Officers submitted fuels and prescribed fire projects with the expectation that the aftermath of the Cerro Grande fire would have limited impact on their programs. Requests for funding were made by July or August before the extent of the damage from internal and external political forces was taken into account. In addition, fuels funding was operating under NTE caps, essentially rewarding the most optimistic planners. As a result, in 2001 there were 101 hazard fuels reduction projects approved in the IMR, and 40 resource

management projects. Combined targets totaled over 69,000 acres. This was 275% of the highest annual report of treated acres, in 1999. 2001 funding for these projects was in excess of \$5.2M. Some projects funded in 2001 were those that had been impossible to implement during the landmark 2000 fire suppression siege that resulted in major legislation and created what is known as the National Fire Plan. In addition, 101 projects were submitted for WUI funding, a new initiative under the NFP, with a price tag of \$3.5M. An undetermined number of projects were duplicate requests for both funding sources.

Inputs of more money and positions may be expected to result in outputs of more acres. 2001 was not normal, however. A number of impediments out of the control of parks greatly reduced production capability. First, the Department of Interior's moratorium on prescribed fire within NPS resulted in the loss of the fall 2000 and spring 2001 prescribed fire seasons in the Intermountain Region. Second, a delay in release of new National Park Service prescribed fire planning guidelines until May 25, 2001, resulted in schedule conflicts between prescribed fire planning and suppression readiness for park fire staffs. Third, new DO-12 Compliance standards for the National Environmental Policy Act implemented in January 2001 required project-level NEPA, an unplanned impact that parks were not warned to expect. Fourth, there were key vacancies in key programs. In a hot fire job market fueled by new National Fire Plan dollars, a combination of factors resulted in inability to retain incumbents and inability to compete for new employees -- (1) NPS lagged behind USFS and BLM in recruitment, (2) an agency hiring freeze occurred with the change in administrations in Washington and no NPS Directorate in place, and (3) the Human Resource Franchise was unable to meet planned timeframes for recruitment with new position descriptions. A fifth factor was an active fire season in much of the West, that was initially thought would be a repeat of the 2000 season; National Preparedness levels were at 4 and 5, and the National MAC Group restricted prescribed fires. Sixth, the events of 9-11 resulted in major changes in airspace management, which significantly altered the ability to use aircraft in support of prescribed fires. Again, the National MAC Group shut down prescribed fires for a time as a result of homeland security concerns and lack of coordination between government departments. It should not be surprising then, that the parks in Intermountain Region produced less than 10% of target acres. Parks that made significant accomplishments despite all the hurdles were Big Thicket National Preserve, Bryce Canyon National Park, Lake Meredith National Recreation Area, Bighorn Canyon National Recreation Area, and Grand Teton National Park. Significant mechanical treatment or burn preparation work was accomplished at Chickasaw NRA, Chiricahua National Monument, Grand Canyon National Park, Mesa Verde National Park, Rocky Mountain National Park, and Zion National Park.

A contract for NEPA Compliance for WUII projects at 11 parks within the Region was initiated mid-summer and work is just finishing up on the last parks in spring 2002. Lack of state-of-the-art fuels reporting and budget systems significantly impacts program management within the IMR.

Fire Use Module Summary

Kim Thomas and her colleagues at the Northern Rockies Coordination Center continued to serve as a clearinghouse for dispatch of IMR Fire Use Modules. Following a National Office directive, Fire Use Modules were committed to fuels treatment projects through July. At a 7/31 meeting, module members raised safety concerns, since most had not been on fires of any kind by then. An active wildland fire use season throughout the Region kept the modules busy from August to October. Significant support for park wildland fire use incidents were made by modules from other regions, including the Black Hills, Buffalo River, and Cumberland Gap Fire Modules. In addition, the Stanislaus National Forest module was used on fires at the Grand Canyon.

Bryan Swift
Regional Fire Management Officer

U. S. FISH & WILDLIFE SERVICE REGION 2 SOUTHWEST REGION



National Fire Plan (NFP) Implementation:

With strong support from the Administration, Congress and the Western Governor's Association, the National Fire Plan has provided increased capacity to federal, state, tribal and local fire management organizations. Considerable effort has been invested in the expansion of existing programs, creation of two program areas, and the addition of 46 additional, FTE's, creating and providing data and reports to the National Fire Center in Boise, the Washington Office, and the Secretary of the Interior.

The Southwest Strategy Regional Executive Coordination (REC) Group assigned NFP Implementation to the Southwest Interagency Fire Management Board (SWFMB). The SWFMB has delegated authority from their respective Regional/State Directors and is made up of the fire program managers for the federal land management, tribal, and state forestry agencies, representing both New Mexico and Arizona. Under the SWFMB's direction are State Coordinating Groups, with the established local interagency zone coordination centers within each state providing the local organizational structure. The SWFMB and the respective State Coordinating Groups encourage the local Line Officers to remain involved, work together, and stay on task with the implementation of the National Fire Plan. There are similar efforts being coordinated with Texas and Oklahoma.

Wildland Fire Preparedness:

A significant aspect of the Service's Fire Management Program is Preparedness. The prevention, detection, and suppression of unplanned wildland fires are accomplished through NRS staffing and equipment available in the event of an unplanned wildland fire. The Regional Performance Capability (formerly Most Efficient Level-MEL) gained an additional 31 positions to expand our firefighting capabilities. The acquisition of equipment to support these increases was also achieved. The Service, working with local cooperators created four new engine stations to provide better coverage within the Middle Rio Grande in New Mexico and South Texas Fire Districts to improve response times and protection to both our resources and adjacent communities. A fifth station is planned at Caddo Lake NWR in eastern Texas in FY 2002. Region 2 also supported the national wildfire suppression effort throughout the above average 2001 fire season.

Wildland Urban Interface Protection/Rural Fire Assistance:

Two new program areas have been created, Wildland Urban Interface protection (9264-WUI), and Rural Fire Assistance (9265-RFA), which increases firefighter safety and enhances the wildland fire protection capabilities of rural fire departments. These additional fund codes include staffing of are additional nine positions to administer these new programs, and \$148,000 of assistance grants to local departments which has been transferred under a MOU's and grants to 48 Rural Fire Departments. Additions to personnel include one new position in each of the following areas: Personnel, Contracting and General Services, Wildland Urban Interface, Fire Ecology, and Fire Monitoring. These new positions will provide the capacity to work closely with our federal, state, local and tribal partners in providing improved protection and hazard fuel reduction on service lands and adjacent communities.

Support to Rural Fire Districts:

<u>State</u>	<u>No. of Departments</u>	<u>Funds/Equipment Provided (9265)</u>
TX	42	\$108,000
OK	0	\$ 0
NM	5	\$20,000
AZ	1	\$20,000
Total	48	\$148,000

Hazardous Fuels Reduction/Ecosystem Restoration:

Project accomplishments for in these program areas for FY 2001 include:

<u>State</u>	<u>WUI(9264)</u>	<u>Hazardous fuels/Ecosystem rest. (9265)</u>	<u>Total</u>
TX	3,266 ac	23,763 ac	27,029 ac
OK	6 ac	372 ac	378 ac
NM	0 ac	17,000 ac	17,000 ac
AZ	320 ac	18,790 ac	19,110 ac
Total	4,586 ac	59,925 ac	63,517 ac

FIRE MANAGEMENT PLANNING:

Efforts are well under way across the Region to complete updated Fire Management Plans for all stations with burnable vegetation. The highest priority was given to those stations which have significant prescribe fire programs that rely upon 9263 prescribe fire funding to assure uninterrupted funding in FY 2002. Due to considerable backlog, the requirement to update all FMP's to the June 2000 standard, and staffing vacancies, a contractor worked with the regional office staff to assist the nine Fire Management Officers in the Region in completing their fire management plans. All of the districts have completed their plans for stations within their district's, which currently employ prescribe fire as a management tool. Out of the 52 refuges and hatcheries in the Region, 19 stations with primary prescribe fire activity have had new plans approved this FY.

FY 2001 YEAR-END BUDGET STATUS:

Based upon significant findings in the National Review of R2 Fire Program, an administrative officer position was created to provide improved overall performance in budget administration. New protocols for tracking and reporting have been instituted for accurate real-time accounting of all fund codes in the fire program. The result is that the FY 2001 budget allocation of \$8,517,486 has been expended efficiently and cost effectively to meet the increasing expectations of the service's Fire Management Program in Region 2.

<u>FUND CODE</u>	<u>Allocation</u>	<u>Remaining Balance</u>	<u>Per Cent Used</u>
9251**	\$4,756,044	\$5,277	100%
9263***	\$1,442,442	\$6,800	100%
9264	\$2,171,000	\$1,112	100%
9265	\$ 148,000	\$ 23	100%

- * These are fund codes that we are "allocated/fund targeted.
- **Includes recoveries (\$282,823) from prior FY's.
- ***Includes recoveries (\$66,679) from prior FX's-OV'HD only

MAIN DECISION OR MESSAGE:

Region 2 is working closely and effectively with our National Office, our interagency partners and local communities to continue our fire management program including expansion into new program areas identified in the *National Fire Plan and the Integrating Fire and Natural Resource Management - A Cohesive Strategy For Protecting People by Restoring Land Health* document. Regular communication and coordination continues. This will be vital in order to assure full implementation of these efforts. Continued support for these expanding programs will be necessary at the national level including reporting and briefing Congressional delegations.

Jeff Whitney
Regional Fire Management Coordinator

**STATE OF NEW MEXICO
FORESTRY AND RESOURCES CONSERVATION
DIVISION
FIRE MANAGEMENT DIVISION**



The 2001 fire season in New Mexico was normal. After the 2000 fire season fall and winter moisture continued until mid May reducing ignitions. Green up of the fine fuels in the spring reduced fire spread as the State entered into its normal "fire season". The Forestry Division received a \$100,000 increase, from the State Legislature, for its Preparedness Fund. The State Legislature approved acquisition of 6 new fire engines for the New Mexico State Forestry Division but funding was lost in a line item veto in the final operating budget for the state.

Forestry Division personnel participated in four incidents where the New Mexico Type II Interagency Incident Management Team was called upon to manage large fire incidents. Forestry Division personnel supported large fire incidents in Arizona, California, Colorado, Idaho, Oregon, Montana, and Utah during the 2001 fire season.

The Forestry Division also initiated its "Twenty Communities At Risk" initiative after the Cerro Grande Fire. As a result of this the Forestry Division was successful in getting funding (\$1.7 million) from the National Fire Plan's Title IV appropriation to begin fuels treatment within eleven of the twenty communities. These fuels treatment projects are being married up with U. S. Forest Service fuels treatment projects for the same communities. On the ground implementation of fuel reduction projects within and adjacent to communities began in August 2001 and are continuing.

In November 2001 the Forestry Division was successful in getting additional funding (\$2.1 million) from the National Fire Plan for the continuation of fuel reduction projects on private lands within New Mexico's "Twenty Communities at Risk". These projects will be implemented sometime in the spring of 2002.

**Frank Smith
Chief, Fire Management Division**

